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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, October 17, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Metals and Kettles." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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You never know where gossip is likely to pop up in this world. But when false rumors begin invading the kitchen, when scandal starts about innocent pots and pans, seems to me somebody ought to come to their defense with the truth.

My feelings on this subject are pretty strong today and I'll tell you why. An evening or so ago, I dropped in at a friend's house to make a little call. In the course of the conversation she told me that she had just thrown out all her aluminum cooking utensils. Naturally I registered shock at that announcement.

"Thrown them out? Why on earth did you do that?" I asked.

Then I learned that some busy-body had been spreading the wild rumor that foods cooked in aluminum are harmful to health -- in fact, are the cause of all sorts of afflictions. It would have been a joke except that my friend had believed all that scandal!

Well, the next day I went to see my friends, the food specialists, to inquire about the matter. They told me that this false rumor about aluminum has been cropping up here and there for some years. They get many letters on the subject. No telling where the gossip started, but it has no foundations at all. In fact, scientists at Johns Hopkins and several other universities carried on a series of experiments with aluminum which showed that this useful metal can do no harm to any person who eats food cooked in it.

So now if anyone ever starts making remarks about your kitchenware, just remember about those experiments and have no fears.

Well, this is just one incident that shows what a good idea it is to know your metals if you are in the business of running a home. If you go to buy just a plain saucepan these days, you have to decide between a large variety of metals-- aluminum or enamelware, stainless steel, copper, iron or some alloy. And in order to make a wise choice you need to know the characteristics of these metals.

Take the case of aluminum, for example. For kettles and saucepans and frying pans, aluminum has three advantages. First, it is a light metal. Second, it never rusts. Third, it is a good conductor of heat, which means that the heat spreads evenly over the entire surface of the kettle and food cooks evenly, isn't so likely to scorch. If you're making jam, say, or cooking vegetables with very

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little water, you'll have less trouble with scorching on the bottom of the pan if the metal is a good conductor. The disadvantage of aluminum is that it stains -- turns dark in the presence of an alkali. It will darken when you cook certain vegetables in it or in the presence of boiling water and melting soap or scouring powders. But you can easily clean it by scouring with steel wool. Or you can brighten it by cooking some acid food in it. Did you ever notice how an aluminum pan cheers up after cooking tomatoes or rhubarb or some food containing vinegar?

So much for the general characteristics of aluminum. But to make a wise choice of kettles you have to go farther than this, and know the different types of aluminumware. Cast aluminum is the heaviest kind. Poor grades of cast aluminum will discolor and pit, but if you buy the good quality, it will see you through your golden wedding anniversary. Cast aluminum won't dent -- a big point in a rough and ready family. Its thickness makes it hold heat well so it is useful for pot roasts and other foods needing long, slow cooking. But, of course, it is more expensive than iron which has been the old stand-by for heavy kettles. Stamped aluminum, the next weight, is less expensive than the cast metal and for many purposes does just as well. But it will dent with hard treatment.

The very thin cheap kinds of aluminum aren't good investments for kettles and pans though they're all right for pudding molds and so on. This very thin metal soon dents and gets out of shape with the heat of cooking.

Now about the other metals. What about enamelware for your kettle? Well, it is light to handle, easy to clean, and doesn't stain or darken with food. These are all points in its favor. But it needs very careful handling or the glass-like surface will chip. Even the best grades of enamelware aren't absolutely chip-proof. A high gas flame applied to one spot on the bottom of the kettle may cause the enamel first to crackle, then to chip. So for some top-stove cooking, enamelware isn't satisfactory. Then, though it absorbs heat evenly, it doesn't conduct it evenly, so you run more chance of scorching food in enamelware. But because it doesn't stain, enamelware is just the thing for double boilers or saucepans in which you are going to cook white sauce, say, or custard, or lemon pie filling which require a good deal of stirring.

Then a word about iron. This old favorite of our grandmothers is durable and inexpensive and ranks with aluminum as a good conductor of heat. Moreover, it is cheap. Its disadvantages are that it is heavy to handle, and plain iron will rust unless you keep it dry and oiled. But some of the new iron kettles have chromium linings to keep them from rusting.

Stainless steel, which is chromium and steel combined, has many good qualities for kettle use but is expensive. It is an excellent heat conductor, browns food evenly, withstands intense heat, doesn't dent, needs very little cleaning, and lasts a couple of lifetimes. But you pay for these qualities. Copper is still another good conductor of heat. But it must be kept bright and shiny which means a lot of polishing.

